

and kept herself from squealing. This was better than the whip cars at the fair!

In no time at all they were in sight of the tall hill that was covered with the city of New Conniston. There it was, glittering for Garnet like Bagdad and Zanzibar and Constantinople. She shook her purse; there was still forty cents inside of it that jingled with promise.

They drove past the first shabby houses of the town, and then the larger ones, and then the stores, and then they stopped.

"Thank you for going so fast," said Garnet to the bus driver.

"Okay, sister," said he, helping her down. "I'm telling you it was a pleasure."

What shall I do first, she thought to herself. First I will just walk up and down the street and listen to the noise.

There was a lot of noise. Trolley cars clanged and clattered on the tracks, automobiles hooted, hundreds of people talked and talked, and their footsteps clicked and shuffled on the pavement all day long. Garnet liked to listen to the noise of a city, the noise of things happening.

Each time she came to the store she stopped and looked in the windows. There were a thousand different things in them that you never saw in Blaiseville. One big window was full of kitchen articles: a pale green stove, and a green porcelain sink; and enamel pots and pans all pale green. Who ever heard of such a thing! And there was a window full of evening gowns; and one with nothing but fur coats. Imagine. Now, in August, fur coats!

In each window Garnet selected a present for her family. The green sink for her mother, and a brown fur coat, and an evening gown like icicles. In Merchant-

Farmer's big display window there was a discing machine that her father would like; and in a toy shop she saw a little fire chief's car just the right size for Donald to ride in.

But for Jay? For Jay -- was she really thinking of a present for him? Why she hated him, didn't she? Hadn't she come all this long journey just because she hated him? Oh no! After all, no matter how she tried, Garnet couldn't even remember, now, how it felt to be angry with Jay. And just then she passed a music store and saw an accordion in the window, shiny and red and silver. Of all things in the world Jay wanted an accordion most. Garnet stood a long time looking at it. She felt pleased and proud, as though she had really given it to him.

"Jay and his old straw stack!" she jeered to herself, and bent her head downward because she couldn't help laughing. "My was he cross! Was he ever cross!"

She had a sudden picture of the straw stack capsizing and burying herself; and for some reason it seemed funnier than anything in the world. She walked along with her chin tucked into her collar, trying not to laugh. But she couldn't help it. The laughter swelled and grew stronger, till she shook with it and her breath came in gasps. People Looked at her and smiled; and a policeman said: "Sure wish I knew the joke, girly." But after a while the Laughing was all used up, and she was able to look about her again and take a deep breath.

Now that she had selected all the things her family most desired she went into the first dime store she saw to buy the presents she could afford.

Garnet loved dime stores and this seemed to be an especially gay and lively one. It was full of people shuffling and pausing and eating candy out of paper sacks. The air was very hot and thick and smelled of

perfume and fried onions and chocolate and fly spray. Balloons on stalks blossomed above the toy counter, and there were red and pink crape paper decorations wound around the pillars and pinned from wall to wall. Babies cried, mothers called, cash registers jingled briskly, and above the racket, live canaries in cages poured out their song as if this were a gaudy but familiar forest of their own.

At counter twenty-seven a lady was putting cold cream on her face, and talking loud in a voice like an old gramophone record. There was a little crowd of people in front of her, women mostly, holding their bundles loosely and staring.

"This cream," quacked the lady, "is made from the oil of young turtles. Apply it at night just before retiring, and pat in vigorously." Here the lady slapped her face heartily in demonstration. "If used constantly it is guaranteed to remove lines, wrinkles, double chins and freckles, and is beneficial to the tenderest skin." Her eye fell on Garnet. "Why even a little girl like the one standing there could benefit by the use of this cream. She won't enjoy those freckles when she grows up!" All the women turned their heads together and looked at Garnet, smiling grown-up smiles.

Garnet felt embarrassed. She moved slowly away from the cold cream people, whistling softly between her teeth. Freckles, for goodness' sake! Who cared about freckles?

It took a long time to get presents for her family because she had to look and select and compare. But finally she had most of them. First there was a Wild West book for Jay; and then a little aeroplane for Donald. There was a bandanna handkerchief for her father; and for her mother she found a ring with a red glass jewel in it, bigger and more beautiful than any

ruby you ever saw. Only Eric was left. What in the world could she give him?

As she wandered down the aisle with her lumpy looking package of presents, she noticed a sad feeling in her stomach.

"Empty, that's what I am," thought Garnet in surprise.

"Empty as a rag picker's pocket." She remembered Mr. Zangl.

After all it was the middle of the afternoon and she had had no lunch. She paused before a sort of glass cage in which a dozen fat sausages lay toasting on a rack. They smelled good. Better than good.

"One of those please," said Garnet giving a nickel to the sausage lady, who had golden hair and strawberry-colored fingernails.

It came tucked into a roll, with mustard on it. And it was better than good. Nothing is so good as a hot dog at the dime store, thought Garnet. As soon as I finish this I'll have another. And then I'll have some kind of ice-cream. And then I'll see.

But just as she had opened her mouth to ask for a second hot dog, a new and dreadful thought occurred to her.

She shook her purse. It sounded quiet; there was no jingle in it. She swallowed and unsnapped the clasp. There was the perfume, yes; and there was the new handkerchief, and the precious thimble. She took them all out and stared into the dark little cave of the pocketbook. Then she held it upside down, but nothing happened. It was empty.

"As a rag picker's pocket," said Garnet for the second time in ten minutes.

"What's the matter, honey?" asked the sausage lady kindly. "Cleaned out?"

"Cleaned out," echoed Garnet, "and I'm eighteen

miles away from home."

The sausage lady had funny thin eyebrows that looked even funnier when she was surprised. She leaned forward to speak; but just then a big woman surrounded by children swept up the counter, puffing.

"Seven," she demanded, "seven hot dogs, please. Two with mustard and five with kraut, and we're in a hurry."

Garnet saw the sausage lady forget all about her, and she went on out of the store.

Well, my goodness, people don't just get lost and starve to death in cities like this, Garnet said to herself. I can hitchhike anyway. It's kind of exciting. I wish day was here.

It was queer though. She went on up the street.

Her shoes hurt her; and with her aching feet, and her bundle and empty pocketbook she felt like an old, old woman coming home from seeing her grandchildren who didn't love her.

The gates of the little park were open, and Garnet went in. It was nice there, the trees cast a dusty shadow, and the fountain sounded like lemonade. Dozens of people were sitting on the benches and the only space she could find was a very small one between a big man with a newspaper, and a little man with a dog. The newspaper was written in a foreign language, and the dog lifted his lip and sneered when Garnet tried to pat him: so as soon as her feet stopped hurting she went sway.

"My, it's noisy," said Garnet to herself. "I'm tired of it. Those trolley cars! They aren't so much."

All the same she would have ridden an one if she had had a nickel. A wave of longing swept over her for her home. No noises there but natural ones, like crickets and cows and roosters in the morning.

Down and down the sloping street she walked;

passing again all the windows full of treasure. And over and over she said to herself like a poem:

"A dime for the hook and a nickel for the plane;
A dime for father's handkerchief,
A dime for mother's ruby ring."

But then of course she had to add: "And a nickel for a hot dog for me!"

And there was nothing for Eric. Oh she felt ashamed of herself. She should have known better at her age, but that half dollar had Looked so big. She had never had all that money to spend before. How disgusted Jay would be! Now there was nothing to do but try to get a tree ride home.

Somehow it seemed easier to ask somebody on a country road than right in the middle of a town like this. She walked and walked. The afternoon burned with a deeper light; soon it would be time for supper. Home seemed as far away as Egypt.

The houses grew smaller and shabbier and fewer as she walked, and now she could smell the sweet soft smell of fields. Think of it! In a few hours she had forgotten how they smelled. and how still they were except for the crickets.

Every time a car went by she turned and raised her hand, but always the car whizzed past her scornfully.

The strapped shoes hurt worse and worse, and she was just going to take them off and go barefoot, when she heard another car coming. She straightened up, raising her, hand. She saw that it was a truck, with a big load of something.

The truck slowed down and stopped, and the driver looked at Garnet.

"Want a lift, kid?" he asked.

He had a nice kind of face Garnet thought, so she said, "Yes I do!" and climbed in beside him. The air

around them was full of cluckings and hen sounds, and when she looked out of the Little window behind her head she saw that the truck was Loaded with crates of chickens.

"Where are you taking them?" she asked.

"Wholesale market over to Hanson," said the driver. "Each one of them chickens was born and raised to be somebody's Sunday dinner."

"Oh," said Garnet. She didn't look at the chickens again, but she couldn't help hearing them.

"Where are you going, kid?" asked the driver.

"I live in a little place called Esau's Valley," she said anxiously. "it's three miles this side of Blaiseville, do you go anywhere near it?"

"Sure do," said the driver reassuringly. "Drive right through it on my way to Hanson."

Oh the good smells of fields in the country! They could have their trolley cars, those city people. Yes, and they could have their green stoves and fur coats, and hot dogs and everything else.

"Been shopping?" asked the driver looking at her bundle.

"I certainly have," said Garnet laughing. "That's why I'm hitchhiking home; I spent every penny I had!"

Then she told him all the things she'd bought, and all about her family.

When they drove down the main street of Hodgeville Garnet heard a sort of crash, and she saw a boy yelling and pointing. She stuck her head out of the window. Behind them there were chickens running all over the street.

"Stop!" shouted Garnet to the driver. "One of the crates fell off and it's broken."

"Them doggone chickens," sighed the driver as he stopped the truck. He sounded as if this had happened

to him before. "I tell you I'd lather be hauling a load of wild bull elephants!"

Garnet hopped out too, and began chasing hens. Cars honked and could not pass; heads poked out of upstairs windows, and people stopped on the sidewalk. Hodgeville's one policeman, Gus Winch, appeared from nowhere and gave advice. People laughed and laughed.

Garnet grabbed at and caught a rust-colored hen by its feet. She reached for another on the radiator cap of a car. The truck driver already had three wildly clucking scrambling bundles of feathers in his arms.

"How many more are out?" panted Garnet, holding onto the hens.

"Let's see. We've got five; must be one more someplace." The truck driver was very red in the face. He picked up the broken crate, set it right side up and dropped the protesting chickens into it. Then he put another crate on top and ran into a hardware store to borrow a hammer.

Garnet saw some bushy black tail feathers disappearing into the open door of a furniture store. She ran after them. What a chase she had! The chicken scrambled under rocking chairs and flapped noisily over tables and upholstered sofas. Half a dozen times her fingers touched its feathers, but each time it got away. Finally she crawled under a wicker settee in a corner and caught it. The furniture store man was upset.

"We ain't used to having poultry loose in here," he complained, and glared at Garnet as though she had done it on purpose.

Garnet tucked the chicken under her arm, begged the store man's pardon, and went outside again.

But no sooner was she outdoors than the hen gave a lurch and a wriggle, and half flying, half running, went skittering down the street. Hands reached for

it, feet pursued it, but the bad black chicken was a match for them all. It sped and dodged along the pavement, clucking furiously, spread its wings and with a last despairing leap landed heavily on top of the swinging sign above a restaurant door.

People laughed and laughed. The street echoed with laughter. The black hen did look funny on its precarious perch, grumbling and muttering and arranging its feathers; and printed in red letters on the sign below it were the words: "Chicken Dinners Our Specialty."

"Now what in time am I going to do!" said Garnet.

The truck driver ran out of the hardware store with a ladder; and no sooner had he set it against the wall than Garnet was halfway up it with her pigtails flying. She was bound that she would get that chicken. And before the chicken could do more than stand up and cluck and prepare to depart, she had it by the leg.

She looked down triumphantly at the truck driver's face. She felt proud.

"Well here it is," she said. "My goodness, I never saw such a chicken!"

She held it close to her and climbed carefully down the ladder. Now that she had it she felt half sorry that she'd caught it. You couldn't blame a chicken for not wanting to be a dinner.

"Well; by gosh," said the truck driver admiringly, "you sure did a good piece of work that time, kid." And bystanders laughed and congratulated her. She heard an old man saying, "That little girl skinned up that ladder like the devil was after her. Quickest thing I ever seen."

The driver put the chicken in the crate with the others. Then he nailed down the top. Garnet noticed that he left the ends of two laths unnailed.

They got back into the truck again and started off. People waved and called good-bye, still smiling. You

could see that they were grateful for having something unexpected to laugh at like that.

It was funny, thought Garnet. This morning Jay had scolded her for doing work badly; and now the truck driver had praised her for Being work well. It sort of made things even.

The driver mopped his hot face with a blue handkerchief, and Garnet brushed off her dress. It was dirty from scrambling around after chickens, and there were pecked places on her arms, but she felt wonderful.

"Does this happen often?" she asked politely.

The driver laughed. "Well, not so often," he said. "But once two dozen of my hens got loose in Chicago in the Loop District. Boy, we had city traffic tied up for half an hour. Didn't lose a hen though. Found 'em in buses and barber shops and I don't know what all."

He smiled at Garnet. "They're good hens though. rye won plenty of prizes on 'em up and down the state, and next month I'm going to exhibit them at the New Conniston fair and see what I get."

He reached into his pocket and tossed a little book into Garnet's lap. On the cover was printed:

PREMIUM LIST
Rules and regulations
Of the
SOUTHWESTERN
WISCONSIN FAIR
New Conniston, Wisconsin
September 9-10-11-12.

The back cover was more interesting. It said:

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS
THE GREAT ZORANDER
3 ACTS 3

The most daring and miraculous feats of balance 75 feet
in mid-air. No safety devices!

THE JEWEL GIRLS AND BRUNO

2 acts 2

Two ladies and a man who are
sure to please with acrobatics
and clean comedy

HANK HAZZARD and his HAYSEEDS

Musicians and dancers who
have staggered Broadway with
their versatility.

ALSO many other acts of
distinction and merit too
numerous to name!

Garnet decided not to miss the fair this year if she could help it; she opened the book and looked at the list of entries. It seemed as if you could exhibit anything in the world, from cows to cross-stitch, from swine to sweet pickles!

As she glanced at the livestock lists something caught her eye: some words in a column under "Class D - Swine Department." She read: "For best boar under six months, first prize -- \$3.50, second prize -- \$1.50."

After all Timmy would be four months old by the ninth of September, and he was certainly the handsomest little pig Garnet had ever seen (thanks to her care). Imagine if he won a prize!

"May I keep this?" she asked.

"Sure thing," said the driver cheerfully. "Are you planning on exhibiting something?"

"A young hog," explained Garnet, and told him about Timmy.

"Well, I hope they pin a ribbon on him for you," said the truck driver. "Sounds like they might, too."

They came into Esau's Valley, now. Garnet's valley too. As long as she lived and wherever she lived this valley would belong to her in a special way because she knew it all by heart.

"Where to, kid?" asked the driver.

"I'll get off at that side road by the mailboxes," said Garnet.

But when she had thanked him and jumped down, she was surprised to see that he too had gotten out and was walking around to the back of the truck.

"Wait a minute, kid," he commanded; he was pulling out the broken crate. Then he swung the two loose-ended laths apart and put his hand in. There was a scuffling and clucking in the crate; and when he brought his hand out again it was holding the bad black chicken by the legs.

"Here's a present for you," said the driver coughing. "I'd never of been able to round up all them hens if it hadn't been for you."

'Oh I couldn't!' cried Garnet. But she knew very well that she could, and that she probably would, because she wanted that chicken terribly.

"Now listen to me," said the truck driver. "You'll be doing me a favor by taking this hen off my hands. She's a born troublemaker and she don't like me. Why I wouldn't be surprised if she pushed that blame crate off the truck all by herself! And I have a feeling she's tough besides and nobody will buy her for Sunday dinner. So how about it?"

"Well," said Garnet, and she put her hand out to take the chicken. "Oh you don't know how glad I am to have her! I hated to think of her on a platter with mashed potatoes and gravy."

"Okay, kid. So long," said the driver, jumping into his truck. And before she could thank him properly, or say good-bye, he was half a mile away in a cloud of dust.

Garnet held the chicken under her arm. Now after all she had a present to give to Eric, and one that he would like better than anything else; a live thing that belonged to himself alone, that he could feed and take care of and build a little house for.

"Nobody will eat you, poor chicken," said Garnet to the hen, who looked tired and deflected, with her red comb drooping.

The road was striped with late afternoon tree shadows. She saw someone walking towards her; it was Mr. Freebody.

"Hello, Mr. Freebody," shouted Garnet, but she couldn't wave because of the bundle in one arm and the hen in the other. And she couldn't run to meet him because her shoes hurt her so badly.

"Look at my chicken, Mr. Freebody!" said Garnet, "and look at my bundle. It's all presents!"

Mr. Freebody didn't say anything.

"I hitchhiked too, just like Eric," she continued.

Still Mr. Freebody didn't say anything. It was queer. Garnet looked at him.

"Are you mad, Mr. Freebody?" she asked.

Mr. Freebody was silent for a second or two longer; then he said, "Garnet, it's a funny thing. I ain't related to you in any way. But I've known your mama since she was Littler than you. And I've known your dad longer than that; and you folks having a farm right next to mine and all of us being good friends has made me feel Like I'm an uncle to you or a granddad or something of the sort. And I've had more worry from you than any young-one I ever knew. Why you wasn't more'n a year old when I took a safety pin out of

your mouth. When you was about three I hauled you out of the crick all muddy and half-drowned. When you was a Little older than that you climbed up a tree in my orchard and couldn't get down again; I had to fetch you down with a Ladder. And then when that mean bull over to Hausers' got after you, who was it pulled you over the pasture fence by the skirt of your dress? I did. And who gave you mustard and water when you et a bite out of that big pink toadstool you found in the woods? I did. And who picked you up and took you to the doctor the time you fell off that heifer you thought you could ride on? I did. Yes, and not so long ago you had us all scared white-haired when you and that little Hauser girl got Locked in the liberry. Now. Here you get all upset over a squabble with Jay and off you go hitchhiking to the Lord knows where."

"To New Conniston," said Garnet in a small voice. This was terrible.

"All right, New Conniston," said Mr. Freebody. "Eighteen miles away all by yourself, without a word to no one. I knew you was up to mischief when I saw you had shoes on. And that dress."

"Is mother worried about me?" asked Garnet.

"No she ain't," said Mr. Freebody unexpectedly. "Matter of fact nobody's worried about you but me. They've been too busy. Your dad thought you was home and your mama thought you was out to the threshing or with the Hauser girl. You said you didn't want dinner so nobody bothered about that. Nope, ain't nobody worried about you but me. And if I was you I wouldn't say nothing about your little jaunt for the time being; no sense in getting your mama upset now that you've been and done it."

"But my presents!" wailed Garnet.

"Presents can wait," said Mr. Freebody sternly. "In a

couple of days when things are quieter, you can bring 'em out and tell your mama how you got 'em."

"Oh Mr. Freebody," said Garnet. "I'm sorry I'm such a nuisance to you. I wish I didn't do things the way I do."

Suddenly she held the chicken out to him.

"Please would you hold her for a minute?" She sat down at the roadside. "I just have to take these shoes off."

Mr. Freebody held the hen and laughed.

"I guess it ain't no use," he said. "I never saw a young-one with spirit that didn't get into mischief from time to time. You're pretty well-behaved on the whole; I wouldn't have you different. Just think a little oftener, that's all I mean. We don't want anything to happen to you."

Garnet felt better. The dust was soft as velvet under her feet, and she could feel each one of her toes rejoicing. Mr. Freebody promised to keep the hen for her till she could give it to Eric.

"What shall I name her?" asked Garnet.

"I ain't much hand at naming things," said Mr. Freebody. "I've always had a horse named Beauty, and I've always had a dog named Major, but I ain't never had a hen named anything. Let's see now. How about Blackie?"

Garnet shook her head slowly.

"I don't think that's quite the right name for her," she replied. "This hen is different from other hens; she has a lot of fighting spirit. There was a goddess once who was a sort of warrior; mother told me about her. But what was her name? I can't remember."

"And I can't help you," said Mr. Freebody.

They went through the gate and Mr. Freebody went

out to the chicken coops to hide the chicken, and Garnet went down to the cold room to hide her bundle.

Ah the time she kept trying to remember the name of the goddess.

At supper everyone was very tired and had oats in their hair and talked about threshing, and how many sacks they'd got, and what a good quality the oats were.

Afterwards Garnet dried dishes. While she was putting plates in the china cupboard day came up to her and said: "As soon as you're finished let's go into town. Mr. Freebody'll take us in and we can catch a ride back with someone. There's a band concert tonight, and we can get some pop or something."

"Okay, let's! Tell Eric too," said Garnet. She smiled at day. She knew that he felt a little sorry for the way he'd spoken to her in the field. But he would never tell her so in words; and it didn't matter.

"Brunnhilde!" she shouted suddenly. day just looked at her. "What in time are you talking about now?"

"There was a goddess who was sort of a warrior," explained Garnet. "She had a helmet and spear and everything, and I just remembered what she was called. I wanted to name something after her."

"Are you ever goofy!" sighed day. "Well, come on, hurry up. I'll help you finish these."

And afterwards Garnet and day and Eric went in to town. It was wonderful.

Lots of people were there because it was Wednesday, the day that farmers bring their cattle in to sell and ship away.

The band played in a sort of screened cage set up on stilts over a street comer. They played loud, cheerful music, and they all had their coats off because they got so hot playing it.

Garnet and Eric and day walked up and down the street and talked to their friends. They stopped and watched a binge game for a while, and then they went up in the band-concert thing, and the drummer let day beat his drum during one entire waltz. All day had to do was to go: Boom thump-thump, Boom thump-thump, over and over again, with a big thundery crash on the Boom and two gentle bounces on the thump-thump. day would have Liked to go on playing waltzes all night, but Garnet and Eric wanted him to come down with them, and anyway the drummer said the next number was to be a march, and much too difficult for day. After that they bought some ice-cream cones, and after that they drank pop out of bottles. And then they got some peanuts in a bag, and walked up the street eating them, and scattering shells and laughing; and everything was all right again.

VIII. Fair Day

ON THE ninth of September the sun came up with a special glory. The air was deep and clear and full of blue light the way it often is in September, and now and then the wind moped a little. There was a huge feeling about this wind though it moved so slightly; it was as if it came from far away, through a door that was open into another space.

Garnet woke up early. Before she was quite wide awake she Lay with her eyes closed, half afraid to look for fear it might be mining. But even with them closed she knew it was going to be all right because the color behind her lids was clear and rosy and she knew the sunlight lay upon them. And she heard crickets in the meadow, and a By buzzing against the screen, and somebody whistling outside. So it was all right and